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the large white lady's-slipper (Cypripedium spectabile) a plant to be avoided; and the absurdity of the notion in the opinion of the other members of the class did not in the least change her positive assertion of its poisonous qualities. It would be a curious and, withal, an interesting inquiry to trace up and catalogue such experiences and to investigate the nature of the poisoning, if such it be. The subject has considerable of the indefiniteness and evasiveness of the ghost, haunted-house and mesmeric questions now being investigated by the society for psychical research, and it may be doubted by some if the results of the inquiry would be any more valuable. There is, however, the substantial question of rhus poisoning, whose etiology has not yet been settled, to afford a *point de résistance,* and when that is fully elucidated the more obscure cases may, to some extent, fall easily into place. Even a knowledge of the extent of the subject would have a value.

OPEN LETTERS.

Organized botanical work.

It seems to me no more important suggestion looking to the promotion of the progress of botany in this country has been made than that of Prof. Farlow, in his paper entitled, "The Task of American Botanists," in which he urges that the amateur botanists of America be organized and their work directed. There are hundreds of educated young men and women in this country who are capable of doing something to promote botanical knowledge, some in one branch, some in another, and who are also eager to do it, but they need to be told what to do, what subjects to investigate. They are desirous of working, but do not know where to begin; or, perhaps, in many cases, they are industriously studying a subject which is too large for them, or one which has already been satisfactorily wrought out, so that their work profits none but themselves. In this way the science suffers an immense loss.

Now, it seems to me, a practical scheme might be devised whereby most of this wasted or misapplied talent might be turned into useful channels. Astronomers are organizing for the systematic study of the heavens; why should not the botanical talent of the country be similarly organized for the purpose of furthering botanical research in a systematic manner? E. S. BASTIN.

Chicago, Ill.

Crackling sound of Utricularia.

I write to ask an explanation of the distinct crackling sound produced by Utricularia vulgaris when it is disturbed. I had for some time supposed it was to be heard only from fronds removed from the water and beginning to dry, but I find the same phenomenon when the plants, old ones filled with sacks, still in the water, are disturbed. On shaking such a stem the rattle is distinct, the separate clicks being as loud as those made by slowly winding a watch. After the first series of clicks the plant must rest some time before a second disturbance will produce a second fusillade. D. S. KELLICOTT.

Buffalo, N. Y.

Bees mutilating flowers.

The note on bees mutilating flowers, in "Open Letters," was interesting to me, having been interested in the same subject myself. I believe it is considered safe to plant two colors of balsams (Impatiens balsamina) in adjacent rows without their mixing. Not being satisfied to take it for granted, I sought the reason. Upon examination I found the anthers were closely pressed to the stigma, thus insuring self-fertilization without any outside help. Also, as the flower became double, the opening to the spur was entirely closed by petals. Humble-bees, in seeking for honey, were obliged to visit the "back" of the flower and puncture the spur. I never saw one visit the inside of the flower nor puncture a spur that had been visited before, though it did not seem to learn that fact until it visited each flower.

Humble-bees, in getting the honey from Salvia splendens, enter the calyx and slit the corolla. This is a very interesting subject, and any one observing anything bearing on the subject would do well to make notes and send them for publication. E. S. MILLER.

Wading River, N. Y.

CURRENT LITERATURE.

Fossile Pflanzen aus der Albourskette, von Dr. A. Schenk. Bibliotheca Botanica, Heft 6, 4to, pp. 14; pl. ix. Cassel: Theodor Fischer, 1887.

The Albourskette, the locality from which the fossil plants herein described were obtained, is a mountain chain on the southern and western sides of the Caspian sea in Northern Persia. It is a locality difficult of access, and consequently has been rarely visited by collectors of fossil plants. The first to explore these plant deposits was Dr. Göbel, of Asterabad, who submittted a small collection to Dr. H. R. Göppert for examination. From this material Dr. Göppert identified (Schles. Gesell., 1860, p. 19, 20) six species, of which four were ferns and two were cycads. From the resemblance between these plants and those obtained in the vicinity of Baireuth, and also from geological considerations, Dr. Göppert concluded these plant-bearing beds to be of Liassic age. Later Eichwald collected from the same locality the species mentioned by Göppert, as well as several additional ones, and ventured the opinion that the strata showed oölitic as well as liassic characters. The material placed at the disposal of Dr. Schenk was collected chiefly by Herr Tietze, from the vicinity of Hif, near Kaswin; from Tasch, which is between Sahachrud and Asterabad; and from Mt. Siodshur, near Ah. This material was much